

The physick gardener

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The exhibition *The physick gardener: Aspects of the apothecary's world from the collections of the University of Melbourne* marks the re-opening of the Medical History Museum following the recent renovations to the Brownless Biomedical Library, in which the Museum is located, and the Library's new additional purpose as a Student Centre. Established in 1967, the Medical History Museum's collection numbers more than 6,000 items. It is one of 32 collections which form part of the University of Melbourne's astonishingly rich cultural capital. The Museum's collection has largely been acquired through public-spirited donors, many of whom have had a professional or student relationship with the University's medical teaching program, or a fascination with the history of medicine. The ceramic drug jars, glass specie jars, and metal and stoneware mortars which are the core of this exhibition were acquired by such means, and the Museum is indebted to those who have enabled these objects to be preserved for all to enjoy.

The first medical students at the University of Melbourne in the 1860s were taught botany, and were required to learn about herbs and their medicinal applications. This practice derived from the 16th century



Opposite: Mortar and pestle, English, c.1850, copper alloy, height of mortar 11.0 cm, pestle 21.5 cm. Gift of the estate of Graham Roseby, Medical History Museum, University of Melbourne.

Below: Specie jar, English, c.1880, glass, gold leaf, coloured transfer and paint, height 67.0 cm. Gift of the Royal Australasian College of Pharmacists, Medical History Museum, University of Melbourne.



European tradition of attaching gardens to medical faculties, which was subsequently emulated in England from the early 17th century.

The exhibition encompasses the flowers, fruits and herbs used by the early apothecaries—including elderberry juice, figs, hemlock, sage, fennel, senna and the pervasive poppy. They are illustrated in the herbals from Special Collections in the Baillieu Library, and depicted in the three-dimensional botanical models of commonly-used medicinal plants from the University of Melbourne Herbarium. Their Latin names encircle the drug jars, and are inked on the botanical specimens' handwritten labels. The mortars and pestles which were central to the apothecary's kitchen are a potent reminder of the physical labour involved in grinding and pounding these plant-based ingredients.

The impetus for the exhibition was the acquisition in 2009 of a group of ceramic drug jars and copper alloy mortars and pestles. They were generously donated by the estate of Graham Roseby, and it was felt immediately that their new status in the collection of the Medical History Museum needed to be celebrated. We have also been able to borrow from the Baillieu Library's Special Collections, Print Collection and

Frontispiece from John Parkinson, *Paradisi in sole: Paradisus terrestris, or, A garden of all sorts of pleasant flowers which our English ayre will permitt to be noursed vp ...*, [London]: printed by Humfrey Lownes and Robert Young at the signe of the Starre on Bread-Street Hill, 1629. Special Collections, Baillieu Library, University of Melbourne.



East Asian Collection, the University of Melbourne Herbarium in the School of Botany, and the Ian Potter Museum of Art, and it is a tribute to the University's remarkable cultural acumen that the exhibition has been curated entirely from six of its own collections on the historic Parkville campus.

The Roseby collection had initially been lent to the Museum. Graham Roseby (1932–2007) trained as a pharmacist in Melbourne, and managed pharmacies for others rather than owning a shop of his own. From the early 1970s to the early 1990s he worked as a pharmacist in the clinics run by the Mental Health Department in Melbourne. His father, a Richmond doctor, had stimulated his then eight-year-old son's interest in medical history when he gave him a book with illustrated biographies of well-known medical scientists. Always a passionate collector in a number of fields, Graham purchased pharmaceutical ceramics at every opportunity—from a passing car spotting something in the window of local auction rooms, to antique dealers abroad during his trips to Britain and Europe in 1954 and 1958. He was a great admirer of the Museum's founder, Professor Kenneth Russell, and it was originally through this connection that the

collection came to the Museum. Following his death in 2007 his widow, Alison Roseby, donated the collection to the Medical History Museum, and a number of drug jars and mortars from the estate of Graham Roseby have been included in *The physick gardener* exhibition.

The other major benefactor of objects in this exhibition is the Grimwade family. The bequest of Sir Russell (1879–1955) and Lady Grimwade (1887–1973) to the University of Melbourne comprised artworks, photographs, decorative arts, furniture, almost 2,000 rare books, historical documents and other memorabilia from ‘Miegunyah’, their home in Orrong Road, Toorak, as well as a substantial endowment including ‘Miegunyah’ itself. Sir Russell Grimwade was the fourth son of Frederick Sheppard Grimwade, a partner in the Melbourne firm of Felton, Grimwade & Co., wholesale druggists, formed in 1867. On his father’s death in 1910, Russell became a partner in the firm.¹ His extraordinarily diverse interests spanned medical research, cabinet-making, industrial gases, forests and the extraction of oils and compounds from indigenous plants such as eucalyptus, and drug plant growth and manufacture. Russell’s interest in books and the natural world is evident

in the two-volume herbal of 1710 by the English writer of medical texts William Salmon (1644–1713), who advertised himself as ‘Professor of Physick’, which is now in the collection of the Baillieu Library.²

The Grimwade bequest collections are mostly housed at the Ian Potter Museum of Art, in the University of Melbourne Archives and at the Baillieu Library.³ Some items were thought to be more appropriate to the collection of the Medical History Museum, to which they were transferred in 1988. Amongst the 14 items thus donated is a group of drug jars, five of which have been included in the exhibition. The key work, the late 17th century English drug jar made to store the juice of the berries of the elder tree, is reproduced on the front cover of the exhibition catalogue.

The Baillieu Library’s East Asian Collection includes the Thomas Chong Collection, the professional library of Dr Thomas Chong (1887–1950), a traditional Chinese medicine practitioner of Bairnsdale. The collection comprises 500 books published in classical Chinese from the 1890s to the early 1920s, complemented by some of Chong’s prescriptions, formulae, invoices, notebooks and shipping bills relating to the dispensing of cures for a wide

variety of ailments. The Thomas Chong collection was donated to the University in 1994 by his widow Dorothy Chong and her family, and included in the exhibition is Thomas Chong’s volume of woodcuts illustrating the various plants from which the herbal preparations were made.⁴

The inclusion of items from the University of Melbourne Herbarium brings to life the plant origins of many of the apothecary’s ingredients. The striking botanical models selected for this exhibition—borage, fig, hemlock, poppy and prunus—are representative of the species used by apothecaries for their medicinal properties, and were produced in France and Germany in around 1900 for teaching purposes. The Herbarium’s collection of 132 botanical models, made by R. Brendel & Co. in Berlin, and by Les Fils d’Emile Deyrolle and Dr Louis Thomas Jérôme Auzoux in Paris, is unique in the southern hemisphere.⁵

Displayed in the exhibition are rare medical books from the Baillieu Library’s Special Collections, comprising herbals and pharmacopoeias, many dating from the 16th and 17th centuries, and deriving from a time of exponential growth in the varieties of plants cultivated in England. The

Pair of Albarelli, Caltagirone, Italy, 17th–18th century, earthenware, height 23.2 and 23.0 cm. Gift of the estate of Graham Roseby, 2009, Medical History Museum, University of Melbourne.

pharmacopoeia produced in Bergamo in 1597 is amongst the earliest works in the exhibition and is a fine example of the recording of plant information for medicinal use.⁶ Founded in 1518 by Henry VIII, the London College of Physicians agreed in 1585 that a pharmacopoeia, or book of formulae for apothecaries, would be of benefit. This became the *Pharmacopoeia Londinensis*.⁷ Contemporary fascination with gardens and plants is paralleled by the development in natural history illustration, with the presentation of flowers in an aesthetic rather than purely diagrammatic manner being exemplified in John Parkinson's important horticultural study of 1629, *Paradisi in sole: Paradisus terrestris*, which is subtitled *A garden of all sorts of pleasant flowers ...*, one of the first English books devoted to flowers as exceptionally attractive specimens as distinct from their curative use.

The richness and depth of the University's cultural heritage are evidenced in the objects which comprise *The physick gardener* which is on display at the Medical History Museum, 2nd floor, Brownless Biomedical Library, Parkville Campus, University of Melbourne, until November 2010.

My thanks to Alison Roseby and her family for their generous donation of Graham Roseby's



collection, which stimulated the development of the exhibition, and for their contribution to the work of the Medical History Museum. I would also like to thank the University's Cultural and Community Relations Advisory Group and its chairman, Professor Warren Bebbington, for supporting the publication of the exhibition catalogue; the Russell and Mab Grimwade Miegunyah Fund for the conservation of drug jars and documents in the collection of the Museum; John Coppock of Pharmaceutical Defence Ltd for his assistance towards the exhibition photography; and Sir Andrew Grimwade who has provided information on the Grimwade family.

Susie Shears took up the position of Curator, Medical History Museum, in 2009. Prior to this her roles included Director of the Victorian Tapestry Workshop, Director of the Geelong Art Gallery and manager of the Australian Pavilion at the 1995 Venice Biennale.

This is an abridged version of an essay published in *The physick gardener* exhibition catalogue.

Notes

- 1 For the biography of Russell Grimwade see John Riddoch Poynter, *Russell Grimwade*,

Botanical model: Borage (*Borago*), *Boraginaceae*,
Les Fils d'Emile Deyrolle, Paris, c.1900,
mixed media including papier-mâché,
wood and metal, height 53.5 cm.
University of Melbourne Herbarium.

- Carlton: Melbourne University Press at the
Miegunyah Press, 1967.
- 2 William Salmon, *Botanologia: The English
herbal, or, History of plants*, London: Printed by
I. Dawks, for H. Rhodes; and J. Taylor, 1710.
Sir Russell and Lady Grimwade Collection,
Special Collections, Baillieu Library,
University of Melbourne.
 - 3 For information about the Grimwade
collections see Rachel Kent and Elizabeth
Aders, *Art, industry and science: The Grimwade
legacy: Works of art from the Russell and Mab
Grimwade Bequest*, Parkville: University of
Melbourne Museum of Art, 1997.
 - 4 Gongxiu Huang, 圖注本草綱目求真: [九卷,
圖一卷, 卷後一卷, 主治二卷, 脈理求真三卷]
/[黃宮繡撰]; 秦鑑泉鑒定 (Tu zhu ben cao
gang mu qiu zhen: [9 juan, tu 1 juan, juan hou
1 jun, zhu zhi 2 juan, Mai li qiu zhen 3 juan] /
[Huang Gongxiu zhuan]; Qin Jianquan jian
ding), Shanghai: Wei wen ge, Guangxu 34
[1908]. Thomas Chong Collection, gift of
Mrs Dorothy Chong and family, 1994, East
Asian Rare Book Collection, University of
Melbourne.
 - 5 There are, however, numerous collections of
botanical models in North America and
Europe, and in particular at the University of
Florence, which holds more than 200 botanical
models made by the Brendel firm alone, and
the National Museum of Liverpool's
collection of approximately 200 Brendel
models.
 - 6 Collegio de' Signori Medici di Bergamo,
translated from the Latin by D. Tito
Sanpellegrino, *La farmacopea o'antidotario
dell'eccellentissimo Collegio de' signori medici di
Bergomo: ...*, Vinegia [Venice]: Nicolo Moretti,
1597. Presented by the Friends of the Baillieu
Library, Medical Rare Books Collection,
Special Collections, Baillieu Library,
University of Melbourne.
 - 7 Royal College of Physicians of London,
Pharmacopoeia Collegii Londinensis, London:
1680. Medical Rare Books Collection, Special
Collections, Baillieu Library, University of
Melbourne.

